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UMUT YILDIRIM

Glaze

Or Formulas to Get through Bad Weather

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ABSTRACT: This short story is set during the military junta of 1980 in Istanbul. On the run and underground with her family, Ö searches for ways to bestow meaning on numerous encounters her father had with thieves.

Glaze

Or Formulas to Get through Bad Weather

UMUT YILDIRIM

On the condition that my words will fully be considered, I can announce the evidence that I rely on.

The fact that a shadow — too engulfed in an apprehension as dark as rotten flesh to tend to my shortness of breath, kindly caressing my hair while I followed him up the two-foot stairs of the dark corridor — recommends that I not be afraid, certainly counts as evidence! Buried shadow. Huh. shad. ow. Huh huh shadow. Huh.

Hahahahah hah ha huh. Some shadow! I know from his rapid heartbeat, his dilated pupils and his tobacco breath, that there is no shadow. He is my corpulent, yet quite young father and, according to him, a burglar has broken into our modest rental house. I no longer remember which, since we moved so many times.

It happens. They always break in. Each time, the light oozing down the corridor (from where the apartment door, which is meant to be closed, has been broken) becomes sensory evidence and makes my father say, 'A burglar has broken in.' My father turns into a shadow, and then something happens to his pupils. Because every time he becomes a shadow, I turn into a Cyclops who can predict the future with an adventure-craving weariness, I drop my backpack from my shoulder with a huff. This is what will happen next: my father will pick up my bag, hold my hand, and with a nervous smile he will say, 'Come

on, darling!'. In quick little steps, he will take me outside, somewhere he deems safe, and, without actually commanding me, in a curt hiss between a plea and a recommendation, he will ask me to wait. I will frown because I do not like to wait, or at least I do not like to be made to wait. My father will go into the building and then into our apartment. If there is no burglar, he will come back to where he left me. If there is indeed a burglar, my father will have to heroically eject him from our house.

Throughout the years, I have become convinced that he *can* expel burglars from our house because, now that I think about it, my dearest father Cem would cry while watching Akira Kurosawa films in his early thirties. He gathered bay leaves from inside sea bass, fertilized jasmine, is an admirer of magnolias, and was an Akiraphile Samurai. A samurai! If a burglar, may he die of thirst on the steep stairs of the corridor, knew that he would face a samurai, would he dare break into our home? Not at all. Even if that's true, what if Samur Cem needs help?

On one occasion, when I got tired of waiting, I tried to follow him inside. He picked me up and galloped us away the moment he saw his Cyclops daughter, standing in the beam of light from the open door at the end of the stairs, hoping to help him expel burglars. I must have perceived that he had not appreciated my action, for although he had not yelled at me, never again did I refuse his request to wait outside. He needs to be able to take care of himself. As you can understand, I cannot always save him.

While waiting and thinking about these things, omitting the fact that he would later become intimately attached to Kurosawa in the period of early maturity, which neither he nor I have yet reached, I wake up to his nervous and deep voice, rousing me from my reverie. I find him with a smile freed of anxiety, his hand freed of anxiety extending in a soft gesture to my bored of being bored hair. 'The burglar's gone, sweetheart', he says. High five! I pick up my bag from the floor, he lifts me to his lap, I throw my arms around his neck, and we enter our home.

The burglars do not take anything from the house. We are transient, a Cyclops family of three, and we own nothing of value. Before we came out as Cyclops, we used to receive many visitors: pipes were smoked, books were discussed, guitars were played to loud cheering, and raucous laughter would break out — not that they visit anymore,

whatever. It is true that we have our own features and belongings, and it is also true that we have nothing worth stealing. These burglars have been unable to achieve anything other than sticking their bear's feet into our home and breaking our things.

Who are these burglars, and what do they want from us?

[*An underfired piece requires a lot of glazing.*]

~

[*First: it is important to know for which body, temperature, and atmosphere you are mixing the glazing. Weathered glaze bubbles, cracks, and crazes over time.*]

[*Basic glazes: RO, RO₂ {PbO, Na₂O, K₂O, Li₂O, BaO, CaO, MgO, ZnO, SrO}*] We are playing remote tickle. No touching is allowed. Only talking. So we are tickling without touching. While kicking around on the floor, I am yelling, 'Father, stop!' and laughing. He makes up nicknames for me, too. Ö ZÜ is my favourite. It is uttered in this fashion, 'Ööööööööö Zü!'. In the years that followed, many tried to repeat this one and failed, because they were unaware of the original intonation, God bless them. Then, on account of the bread slices I burnt at breakfast one morning, he called me 'Coal-master Mustafa'. But that one did not stick. He called me 'Ruskating', after I referred to Russian figure skating as such. Next, he changed to calling me 'Özika-Honorika-Valentinika-Tatata!'.

He had a moderate sympathy for all things Soviet, the kind that does not recklessly produce hammers and sickles wherever it goes. At first, I thought it was merely a literary and philosophical interest (he loves to read) until he bought me Ilin and Segal's *How Man Became a Giant*, as every socialist does for their offspring. It may have been my first year of primary school. A person is, of course, old enough to grasp materialist philosophy at seven years old. And I had been through a pre-curriculum, which was gently anthropological in its nature. I knew about things like 'worker uncles' and 'worker aunts', 'class', *bourjoya*, *revolutionanny*, *communix*, *anarchix*, *imperialix*, and fair distribution, not merely from the place they occupied in the lexicon of the militant, but also from personal experience. I have long been aware that bourgeois women who get their hair blow-dried and wear red nail

polish have betrayed our cause, to such an extent that right around that age, my militant's destiny made me attack my beautiful mother with a slobbery growl of 'bourjoya' as she sat in the hairdresser's chair.

Later, as I collected Debussy and Schnittke records from the frgrant second-hand booksellers in Beyoğlu; as I admired the powerful fragility of Mümtaz and Nuran's love in Ahmet Hamdi's *Huzur*; as I looked for C's footprints on Kumbaracı Yokuşu after reading Yusuf Atılgan's *Aylak Adam*, though I cared little for C's fallen virility; as I was reading, alternatively, Begoña Aretxaga, Jacques Prévert, J. H. Prynne, and Audre Lorde in hazy London cafés; as I was cooking mussels with white wine and sea bass with plums that I collected from Antigoni Island; as I fell in love with both Sicilian lace and Concrete music; as I was cloudgazing, doing all these herebys, I would have that militancy removed. What I mean is, if it is not in the essence of the object, flattening sharpness looks unpleasant on a human being. Therefore, since most socialists never get the opportunity to have children because they are murdered, imprisoned, crippled by torture, busy with militant activities or undergoing a nervous breakdown, as the child of the few socialists blessed with kids, I quickly neutralize *How Man Became a Giant* instead of reading it cover to cover as I ought to because my mind is perpetually in the sea, in hopscotch, in Chinese jump rope, in dodgeball and in skittle hide-and-seek — I am completely obsessed with scheming ways to pluck the cherry tree before it is too late in the year, obsessed with geometry and the logic puzzles of the magazine *Science and Technology* and what not, these type of things. I'm an incurable romantic. I write poetry.

Wherefore these falling leaves?
And, why these endless pains?
Why is it that I miss you,
Every day, once anew?

[*Amphoteric glazes: R_2O_3 { Al_2O_3 , B_2O_3 }*] With my hair in a twist from distance-flirting, and my collar unstarched on my throwaway school uniform, as a seven year-old *je t'aime*, I sense it! Samur would get me started on Ilin and Segal, then he would destroy me with brick-sized ova-evski books, and, good God, he would prepare me for Poulantzas or something! Since my vigilant, golden-hearted mother

Roza swore to protect her offspring from anything unexpected, she has herself become a panther, subject to the unexpected. She would protect me from reading banned books. However, concerning these matters, there's no trusting Samur — he will just throw a book in front of you, you may read it with interest just because it came from Samur. So, what do we learn? Since he knew so much about these things, Samur would keep these bricks away from me. I am a militant girl-child. If a sister is the kind of comrade with whom one cannot voluntarily and openly make love, a child is the kind of comrade who thankfully goes unnoticed as such. I must take measures, as you will appreciate.

[*Acidic glazes: RO_2 { SiO_2 , SnO_2 , TiO_2 , ZrO_2 }*] Özika-Honorika-Valentinika-Tatata! He really likes this nickname. Although it is really long, he can repeat it without getting bored. He bursts into a crescendo of laughter at the Tatata. He is wildly happy! I laugh it off. As you know, there's no use in being a child around a child. I let him act like a rascal because he has suffered a lot, though I am not entirely sure why and how. I may have developed this opinion because his heart went boom boom BOOM BOOM while moving up the steep stairs of the dark corridor. And when the burglars came, something would happen to his pupils. My eyes are on Samur. Though he does not realize it, I know that I need to protect him. That's why my eyes are on myself.

~

[*In addition to the raw materials used in glazes, there are also metal oxides that will render them impervious to crackling effects of weathering. During the development of the glaze at high temperatures, these oxides fulfil various functions.*]

[*Glassifiers: SiO_2 , B_2O_3*] Hrrr hrrrrr harh h h h h haaaarrhhhhh rah rah hhh h. The shadow is running quickly. The orange street light blends into the sooty black walls — topped with shards of glass — of a sugar factory on a narrow street. Samur is running hhhhrrr haaarh hhhr. He is panting. I'm unable to touch his dark shadow. I can't tell if it's him who is running, or if his shadow has taken over him. The silhouette looks like Samur: his athletic body, his longish hair, his turtleneck sweater and bellbottom pants, his long-fingered hands extruding from his jacket. That is Samur! I am not sure. That is Samur! He is running.

Others are running after him. Samuhhhr hhhhhh haaarhg is running. The others are right behind him: tap TAP clump CLUMP! Samur runs. They can't catch him.

[*Fusers and stabilizers, respectively: Na_2O , K_2O , Li_2O , PbO , B_2O_3 ; CaO , MgO , BaO , Al_2O_3 , PbO , ZnO*] On that day, when they arrived in one of the working-class neighbourhoods where I grew up, in a manner unbefitting a samurai, the policemen put Samur into their van, pressing his head down and twisting his long swan's neck. Unlike what happens in the recurring running dream that has been haunting me for years, Samur failed to turn into a shadow. He was caught. While huge-legged and larger-bellied old women stood behind the van, saying: this happened and that happened, so it happened, ah is that what happened, did this happen, it did so happen, with my football in hand, dressed in my shorts and standing on tiptoe, I tried to create a view through the what-a-shame, what-a-pity hips that blocked me. Finally, I saw my father. Waving at me from the window, he looked more perplexed than I had ever seen him. He was gesticulating. I'll be back tonight, he said. We will cook before my mom comes home. My father cooks and does the dishes. I wipe them dry. I'm not tall enough yet to reach the kitchen cupboards and put them away.

[*Matte glazes and opacifiers, respectively: ZnO , TiO_2 , CaO , BaO ; SnO_2 , ZrSiO_4 , ZrO_2 , TiO_2*] Oh Samur from the window, from the police van, from the world that twisted your swan's neck, why do you wave? Why can't I come with you? Alright. I'll wait if I must. But Samur, under these conditions, as we both know you may never come home.

[*Crystallisers: ZnO , TiO_2 , CaO , Cr_2O_3*] Her face whitewashed and grey, my mother comes. She is about to break, and yet she listens to the women talking, as though the events they speak of have no connection to us. I hide under her coat. Samur does not come home that night. With hope, I wait for him. He does not come home for another week. I could not protect him. My tears flow dry, and my neck twists, like an intensely green leaf that gently lands on the ground as it gets too heavy for her huge palm tree.

Then his long fingers were all warped
 crooked, gnarled smitten smitten
 the devil got into his hangnails
 the nail enveloped his soul
 his teeth retreated into their gums and fell off.
 In the end, his nose got hairy
 his hands were all tied
 Then he got a hump
 his feet shuffle and stumbled as he walked
 his breath faded
 his fingers turned yellow
 ether, he became ether
 Samur went from bad to worse.

The revolution collapsed, and melancholy ate my father up. Samur settled into a regime of glorious, self-involved pain. Sadness penetrated Samur, the radiant child, the dissenting genie, the rebel boy fallen in love with black bile. The bile scorched him and burned him. The bay leafs wilted, the jasmines faded, the magnolias fainted, the lemons sagged. And Samur unleashed his anger on everyone.

~

While Samur fell in love with black bile, and burglars kept pillaging our home, I started my second year at a new primary school. Pretty Erol, who died from heroin when he was seventeen, and his mother, Nigâr Hanım Teyze, who forced the neighbourhood indoors on Friday nights when she cooked tripe, and her daughter, Melek Abla, whose scarred face was said to be warped from walking on hot embers during the evening call to prayer; the alcoholic former-policeman, Mr. Dipstick whose name I cannot recall, and his wife the porcelain fiend, Çiçek Hanım Teyze, who he regularly beat; the cheerful mother of three daughters and one son, Mavi Hanım Teyze, who slept with neighbourhood men for pocket change while her husband laboured in Libya, and their daughters, the malicious Hülya, the evil-eyed Oya, and the supple Nida, who was so educated and graceful that she did not appear to belong to her family; the donkey-eyed and very smart daughter of Muzaffer Hanım Teyze from apartment 10, Selma Abla, who always had a book; and the oldest of the seven children in apartment 9, Pınar Abla, who Selma eternally loved, the only girl in the neighbourhood



Yusuf Sevinçli, *Post 023-Istanbul*, 2012, courtesy of the artist.

to attend university — I was transferred to a primary school in the council estates of an ancient Istanbul slum that embraced these people and many other similar ones.

Occasionally, the adolescent boys, who communicated by transmitters, played us songs from Orhan, Müslüm, Fikret, the Eagles, and Chicago. The tunes would get under my skin while we ran around in the sun with my friends among the oleaster, plum, mulberry, and cherry trees, and later, in the poppy fields, we heard arabesque melodies when we took off on flying horses. We escaped the tables of evening drinkers who lived in derelict houses, a bit further away, with curiosity, we poked our noses into the gypsy neighbourhood. Is there anything more pleasant than being surprised? Every child should run free in the streets. Here we are with our heads miles above the clouds, our gravity-hating knees covered in wounds. In those years, when everything was a wonder, I forgot about Samur. And the burglars. For ten years or so.



Yusuf Sevinçli, *Post 024-Istanbul*, 2012, courtesy of the artist.

[*Weathered glaze can collapse.*]

I am scraping slightly burnt bread slices with a knife, and Samur is setting the table. My mother is frowning calmly at the newspaper. We have never been a family that constantly hangs out together, in close quarters, in each other's hair, on top of each other, in a tangle. We each live in our own space, so when we are together, especially if it happens to be during breakfast at the start of the day, it can be precious and intense — we turn into a political organization. This is a breakfast table organization where the recent political conjuncture is evaluated, literature is discussed, a bit of gossip is exchanged to spice things up, mind you, Samur only learnt how to gossip with a laugh after turning sixty-five, which made us very happy, decisions concerning the household are made, propositions concerning cats, dogs, plants, trees, and human health and development are discussed, criticisms are expressed, voices are raised, tears are shed, laughs are full, and kisses are sweet, and everything is prepared with love. A lot of love.

According to an article in the paper, which my mother left on the table as she went to the door, a person named Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of an organization called the PKK, is a supporter of the Galatasaray football club. So? I think. Two-thirds of the people of Turkey commit this error. Why is this newsworthy? While I am scraping a piece of bread, I ask Samur: 'What's the PKK, Father?'. He gives me a look of disappointment that cannot hide his aspirational agenda. 'What a shame', he says, to no one in particular; yes, he says that, and leaves the table.

He did not have to leave in this manner. Samur had previously taught me the meanings of Kurdistan and Kurdish. On a weekend when I was confused, attempting to understand the concept of absolute borders separating regions and countries that I was fed at primary school, I had asked for his help. He did not make my task any easier. 'This here', he had said, indicating a place called South Eastern Anatolia, 'is an area in our country. But this place, according to some, is the northern part of a place called Kurdistan.'

- Why has it been drawn like this, as though it has always been this way?
- To make it easier.

- It's not easy. If it is both this way and that way, why is it only drawn like this? Who is drawing these borders? Who is filling in their insides?
- Well, borders are not absolute; they can change.
- (Though I felt that the *imperialix* and the bosses were involved in this mess, I did not stray off topic.) How can they change?
- Referendum.
- (Yay! An unfamiliar word!) How does that work?
- The people who live there can change the boundaries through democratic means if they so desire.

At first it seemed plausible. Democracy. I knew about that. It meant that workers would be happy. Other than kids, but not counting my classmate, Serkan Dal, who worked as a shoeshine boy, everyone I knew worked: my mother, my granny, Samur. All the adults I knew worked, or were looking for work, so all adults should be happy. But what would happen to Serkan Dal? Someone is always left out. Alright, let's focus: all creatures on earth live inside these borders, cats and dogs, granny's geraniums, even the imagination-deficient people who drew the borders and filled in their insides. Serkan Dal as well. (Although Serkan Dal did not want to work, and in that case, he may not have had any connection with a democracy that made people happy, and he may not have had any connection with the referendum, therefore what was supposed to happen to the happiness of those who did not work and who did not want to work?) Argh, I could not wrap my head around it. If we leave Serkan Dal to the side, (but how could we leave him out? We shared a desk. And I know he wants to smash his shoe-shine brush into five pieces on the floor. CRACK!) While thinking through this puzzle of democracy, my teacher's voice startled me, asking what we learned over the weekend. I blurted out, 'Referendum!' and was sent home for the day. So, what? I threw my schoolbag to the ground and climbed the cherry tree, getting in my practice before summertime.

As Samur returned to the table with tea, and my mother returned with toast, I do not know what it is that touched me, but I could not contain myself:

- You should not have left me with Mama Rezzan.
- Why do you mention Mama Rezzan now?

- You can't be cross with me, Dad. I can be cross with you.
- You don't say! And why is that?, said Samur.
- There's something. If I feel so...
- What does Mama Rezzan have anything to do with this?
- Oh dear!, said my mother. She was a very important, very lovely person. A bit on the opportunistic side, a bit of a revisionist, but that's fine.
- You should not have left me with Mama Rezzan.
- Özgür, what are you saying?
- They shot up the place.
- What are you saying?
- You weren't there when the fascists fired, only Mama Rezzan and I were home. She shoved me under the table. That's why we made it out alive.
- Darling, what are you saying?
- Özgür, for god's sake. Is such a thing possible?
- Of course, it's possible! Plus, that day, as the military police came in to apprehend you, weren't you the one who handed me over to Süheyla Abla who was sleeping inside, oblivious to the event? Süheyla Abla and I made it out alive because we were hiding behind the sofa!

The choir continues rehashing the same motifs: My child, what are you saying? My child, is it possible? My child, where does this come from now? While they keep trying to prove that these two tales are not real as I would come to understand and accept in the upcoming years, I am turning inside out with a gurgling sound, to-the-point-of-no-return. I explode like a fire:

- And who were those burglars!? What did they want from us!?

[Glazing gives the body to which it is applied a shiny and smooth surface. Since it forms a non-conductive barrier, it protects the body from weathering, insulating it. The glazing also provides mechanical resistance and electrical isolation. It protects the body from acids, bases, scratches, and impacts. It ensures hygiene, prevents the proliferation of microorganisms and limits their actions. It prevents dirt build-up and ensures easy cleaning. It brings colour and textural features to the surface and increases the aesthetic value of the object.]

TRANSLATED FROM TURKISH BY UMUR ÇELIKYAY